

Mayors à La Mancha: An Aspect of Depression Leadership in Canadian Cities

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Article abstract

Conventional city politics — that is, non-partisan politics loosely identified with Liberal and Conservative urban elites — dominated major Canadian cities to the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. At that time they were challenged by representatives of a broader democracy in the form of *Socialist* organizations and *Charismatic* individuals with personal followings. With few exceptions the challenges were unsuccessful. The crisis of the 'thirties, however, proved more amenable to both types of challengers. The Charismatics of the depression proved once again to be ephemeral, unable to establish a permanent hold on their cities. But they often altered patterns sufficiently, if temporarily, either to enable Convention to beat back a Socialist challenge or to enable the Socialists to succeed to control.

Mayors à La Mancha:

An Aspect of Depression Leadership in Canadian Cities

John H. Taylor

Résumé/Abstract

La politique municipale *traditionnelle*, c'est-à-dire une politique non partisane qui était plus ou moins le fait des élites urbaines conservatrices et libérales, domina les grandes villes canadiennes jusqu'à la fin du XIX^e siècle ou au début du XX^e. A cette époque, elle se trouva remise en question par les représentants d'une démocratie élargie, constituée de meneurs *charismatiques*, qui s'attiraient les sympathies populaires, et de groupes *socialistes*. A quelques exceptions près, ces efforts restèrent infructueux. La Crise des années trente, toutefois, offrit un terrain plus favorable aux deux mouvements contestataires. Une fois de plus, les chefs charismatiques ne connurent qu'un succès éphémère et furent incapables de s'implanter solidement dans leurs villes. Ils réussirent toute de même à modifier suffisamment les courants établis, bien que de façon temporaire, pour permettre soit aux partis traditionnels de repousser les socialistes, soit aux socialistes de s'emparer du pouvoir.

Conventional city politics - that is, non-partisan politics loosely identified with Liberal and Conservative urban elites - dominated major Canadian cities to the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. At that time they were challenged by representatives of a broader democracy in the form of *Socialist* organizations and *Charismatic* individuals with personal followings. With few exceptions the challenges were unsuccessful. The crisis of the 'thirties, however, proved more amenable to both types of challengers. The Charismatics of the depression proved once again to be ephemeral, unable to establish a permanent hold on their cities. But they often altered patterns sufficiently, if temporarily, either to enable Convention to beat back a Socialist challenge or to enable the Socialists to succeed to control.

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Prior to the depression of the 'thirties the mayors of most large Canadian cities appear to have been drawn from small business or liberal-professional groups, and most had a discreet but widely recognized attachment to the Liberal or Conservative parties. In most cities they normally operated without a formal, continuing, extra-legislative organization, which was frowned upon, and normally experienced a

rapid turnover. Five or six years as mayor was a long stretch, with two to four years the more normal tenure, and in some centres, like Toronto or Ottawa, even four years was exceptional.¹ Moreover, the mayoralty only infrequently capped a long career on the aldermanic board. The more talented or aggressive seemed to rise rapidly through municipal ranks, and in many instances, especially if reform or improvement seemed

imperative, a prominent member of the business community, whether politically experienced or not, would be parachuted into the mayor's chair.²

These were the *Conventional* mayors of the Canadian cities and seem akin to the "small business" and "Patrician" mayors identified by American studies. But the role and evolution of the Canadian mayors distinctive. Comparisons can be instructive, but are not exact. There were different patterns of city development in Canada, and cities grew in a different political milieu, one in which federal and provincial political organizations were not formally extended to the local level, and one in which property franchise and qualification limited participation until well into the twentieth century. The terms "Convention" and "Conventional" mayor better capture the mainstream political experience at the local level in Canada.

The political hallmarks of Convention, as used in this context, were non-partisanship and political independence, generally coupled with a highly developed sense of hierarchy, perhaps part of the conservative tradition in Canada at all levels. An urban elite, regardless of time or place, seems to have felt it had a right or duty to rule, whether that elite was a commercial one, an industrial one, or a liberal-profession reform one. The norm of local politics in Canada until the early twentieth century was thus "Conventional factionalism." Even the reform phase of the turn-of-the-century city did not seem to express a politics of polarity, but rather various factions of Convention

struggling for the pre-eminence of their views. Nor did any of them formally or organically align themselves with Liberal or Conservative organizations at the senior levels, even though local politicians individually were often very active Liberals and Conservatives. In current rhetoric, city politics were simply not place for partisan activity. Just why is not clear. Some people clearly believed the rhetoric: cities should be run like business corporations. But in some quarters, there was clearly the sense that a partisan division of the elite would expose it to defeat from the dark and ominous masses that comprise the bulk of all city populations. Ironically, the non-partisan tradition may have provided the left with greater opportunities to survive in Canadian cities as compared with American ones. In the United States the numerous socialist governments at the local level failed to endure partly because local politics extended upwards to the state and federal levels, and there socialism failed. In Canada, because of the non-partisan tradition, the connection was not important. Because the local Liberals and Conservatives chose not to form organic links to the provincial and federal organizations, the left did not have to do so either. In fact, it was condemned for the attempt.

Convention pretty much had its way in Canadian cities until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, when it was challenged by representatives of the larger democracy, most of which was now able to vote, at least for mayor and aldermen. As a general rule, the challenge took two forms, a Socialist form, and a Charismatic

or Populist form.

The Socialists attempted to use formal institutions, akin to parties, to organize the urban social landscape for political purposes. Their challenge to Convention generally implied conflict or polarization of the urban political process. Conventional factionalism, as the norm of local politics, was changed mainly due to the Socialist presence. After the arrival of the Socialists, Convention organized into that curious phenomenon, the non-partisan organization. Though they went under a variety of labels - creating the alphabet parties of local government - such organizations, ostensibly formed to keep organized *politicians* out of City Hall, were in fact designed to keep organized *socialists* out. Where the Socialists were strong, as in the four western provinces, the non-partisan organizations were endemic; where the socialist parties were weak, as in Toronto, there were merely *ad hoc* gang-ups of Liberals and Conservatives; where the Socialists were fragmented, as in Hamilton, so was Convention; and where Socialism was non-existent, so was non-partisan organization. Socialism as an organized challenge seemed to precipitate organized responses. Alphabet parties do not seem strongly associated with a Charismatic challenge.

The Charismatic form of challenge was generated by maverick individuals, usually mayoral candidates, who were often accused by Convention - using borrowed but usually irrelevant American pejoratives - of being at the centre of "rings" or "Tammany Hall cliques." The Charismatic challenge to privilege was, like the socialist, democratic, but it

was not intended to be polarizing. It sought to avoid class conflict and ideally to achieve a sort of universal urban consensus. Mavericks as mayors were a fixture in varying degrees of strength in the politics of local government in Canada before 1930, and central to the experience of Montreal from about 1910. In the crisis of depression they flourished, peaking in numbers about 1934-35. In a twisted, and rather caricatured way, they fit the description applied to Charismatic leadership by Max Weber, in which their authority rested "...on devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him...."³ Their character and activities also conformed in a general way to the descriptions Weber scattered throughout his works.

In most cases they were strident, enthusiastic individuals who made a great point of their independence from establishments of all kinds. "Fightin'" Joe Clarke, the mid-depression mayor of Edmonton, was typical of the genre when he claimed that Convention as it manifested itself in Edmonton had put the city "on the bum," and labour had kept it there.⁴ Most had come from backward circumstances. Clarke had drifted into Edmonton from the Yukon gold fields; Gerry McGeer, of Vancouver, had begun his business career driving his father's milk wagon, then became an iron moulder, and finally a lawyer; Andy Davison of Calgary was a typographer; Cornelius Rink, of Regina, an itinerant Dutch immigrant; Camillien Houde, an insurance clerk. Many had been born on the wrong side of the tracks: Houde on an "un-named"

Montreal street; P.J. Nolan, of Ottawa, in the city's lower town. Most led rather unconventional lives, and most had rather questionable professional qualifications, like George Wenige, of London, who called himself a real estate broker and was called by his opponents a "correspondence school lawyer," or Clarke, of Edmonton, who appears to have *been* such a lawyer, but termed himself a "gentleman." Most had never been accepted by the Conventional or Socialist establishments, and where acceptance had been established, as with Houde and McGeer, it was followed by a rather spectacular break with an uneasy return to the fold sometime after. Their political organizations were casual and centred on themselves; they normally surrounded themselves with loyal advisors from outside the ambit of local politics, which sometimes led to accusations by opponents of constructing "machines" or "rings." But there is little evidence that these were self-serving organizations, at least for the mayors themselves. Many seem to have ended their days in rather mean and impoverished circumstances, Lewis D. Taylor, of Vancouver, living at the last in a small downtown room and dependent on the charity of his former political opponents. They all had an antipathy "... to rational, and particularly bureaucratic, authority..."⁵ manifested best perhaps in their often tendentious clean-up campaigns, their sacking of city hall bureaucrats, and in their unilateral and collective attacks and acts with respect to local debt and the "usurers" and "money-changers" who created it.

Most had charters of action. McGeer adumbrated his in a whole book, which featured Abraham

Lincoln as the pre-eminent political economist of his century, a man murdered by an international financial conspiracy for his refusal to convert greenbacks into silver.⁶ And McGeer, late in 1936, equipped himself with body guards and did not run for re-election in the belief that Lincoln's fate also awaited him. But mainly the charters of action appeared in campaign newspaper advertisements or in inaugural addresses. It was an unusual procedure. The exposition of a programme, or even the possession of one, was not common up to the 'thirties, though sometimes done by the Socialists if they had funds. Convention generally eschewed a programme, a position that was, after all, congruent with their emphasis on independence and non-partisanship. The individual, his character, experience, and proven ability - usually business ability - was stressed.

For the Charismatic, the constituency, in every case was "the people," without regard to class or any other category, except for the evil "interests" of Convention or Socialism. Clarke, of Edmonton, put it in a nutshell when, in a pre-depression campaign, he solicited the "vote and influence" of "wage workers, ... retail clerks, [and] ...red-blooded sports fans...."⁷ That their appeal in general worked is supported by voting patterns. Though they sometimes savaged their opponents, more often the contests were narrower, and in these the Charismatic appears to have received most of his support from the lower middle class and working class "people" of his city.⁸ That is, they tended to chew into the constituencies of both Convention and Socialism, expecting their core support areas. The devotion of

their constituents was not one born of class, though sometimes culture, but rather one "born of distress and enthusiasm."⁹ At least that seems to have been the case in the depression. In more normal times, the Charismatic seems to have emerged from time to time as a means of punishing or warning Convention, or as the political expression of the disadvantaged who seemed perpetually voiceless. That is, the people erected, in a manner of speaking, a plebiscitary dictatorship in which the dictator proved impotent, however well meaning.

But while Charismatic, these mayors of the depression failed to conform in many important ways with Weber's ideal type, especially as reinterpreted in subsequent literature. Weber saw his Charismatic leaders as essentially (though not always) rational, and through "routinization" the bearers of constructive, if revolutionary change, while much of the recent literature perceives leadership in crisis as essentially demonic, irrational, or psychopathic, hence the repeated references to Hitler and the like. The mayoral Charismatics of the depression were neither progressive nor predatory. They were quixotic.

To begin, these men of the depression, while harbouring an antipathy toward the legal-rational did *not* reject "...traditional authority, whether in its patriarchal, patrimonial, or any other form."¹⁰ Most of these men, in fact, sought a return to verities of the immediate or distant past, especially religious verities. A number, for example, became adherents of the Oxford Group Movement, with its dicta of "absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute

love." Many saw a return to fundamental religious precepts as the answer to the depression. McGeer in his inaugural address, his first act as mayor, urged Vancouverites to go to their churches and pray for remission of civic sins as a solution to the depression. The response was enormous. Camillien Houde told Canadians that the source of evil was in the turning away from paternalism toward "materialism and mercantilism":

I believe that the limited liability company, both from the moral and material standpoints, is the most serious error of our century. It is driving us straight into a paganism which will, if it continues, lead to the disappearance of our Western civilization.¹¹

The anonymous corporation had removed morality from the balance sheet of human action and replaced it with merely calculable factors and also with women, who were replacing men in the work place.

The man at home in a bathrobe while the woman is in a factory in pyjamas, the husband taking care of the children while the wife is out fighting for their daily bread and perhaps her honor, that is the world upside down.¹²

Cornelius Rink, as Mayor of Regina, advocated a return to Precambrian social welfare, hence his proudly-worn sobriquet of "Rock Pile" Rink. Without exception, they were opponents of socialistic doctrines, McGeer ultimately becoming the scourge of the left in Vancouver and Sam McBride the victorious crusader against Toronto's first Socialist mayor,

"Jimmie" Simpson.

In one other important way they failed to conform to the classical definition of Charismatic: they were unable to translate either their popularity or their ideas into a continuing organization. They failed to make the revolution permanent, though in Montreal the pattern remained. By 1938 they were mostly gone from the municipal scene, and either Convention or Socialism had taken charge.

The analysis and prescription of the quixotic charismatics was in the main hopelessly romantic. They reached backward in time for scapegoats, and the attack on scapegoats and their extirpation was the anodyne of distress. Like the man from La Mancha, they were tilting at windmills and attacking fantasies. They were comic exorcists of time gone out of joint.

It is not surprising to find the emergence of Charismatics and Socialists in great numbers in the depression of the 'thirties. The sorts of situations that produced them in more normal times were much exaggerated in hard times. Before the depression, they emerged from time to time as the expression of the disadvantaged in the nation's cities. In Montreal, where large social groups perceived themselves to be in a permanent state of inferiority, and where the Socialist alternative was repugnant to the political traditions of the province, the Charismatic - from Médéric Martin to Camillien Houde to Jean Drapeau - became a fixture, before, during, and after the depression. Elsewhere, the challenge to Convention was occasional before the depression.

But with the depression both the Charismatic individual and the Socialist organization were able to launch a more effective challenge. In the first place the reputation of the traditional rulers of the city was much blemished by the economic collapse, and their ineffectiveness and even callousness in the first few years after 1929 created a good deal of antagonism. More important, the depression exaggerated social cleavages in the city. By the early twentieth century the vertical social structures of Canadian cities had been mapped horizontally. Typically, the urban landscape was a ghetto mosaic of rich, poor, and in-between. In the 'thirties, the chief victims of unemployment were the already poor - those at the bottom of the social scale - and, therefore, unemployment was concentrated in the areas of the city in which the lower classes lived. Unemployment in the cities was both social and geographic. The cities in the depression were thus twice polarized, and a politics of crisis was more than ever susceptible to a form in which class confrontation would be the dominant motif. It was fertile milieu for the Charismatic. He was a man with answers. He was equipped with political patent medicine guaranteed at the same time to relieve the pain of crisis and dissolve the impending class confrontation. He behaved, as a crisis politician, in much the manner suggested by Devereaux.¹³

The depression was something more than an objectively measured deviation from some "normal" pattern, as measured in terms of national product building permits, unemployed, foreclosures, suicides,

birth and marriage rates, immigration statistics, debts, auto sales, and exchange rates. It was, in the words of Devereaux "...more than a situation of extreme social stress...", susceptible to rational action, the sort of action traditionally prescribed and widely attempted in the early years of the 'thirties: economic retrenchment and autarchy, political stability, and private charity and work-for-relief. The depression, by 1932 or 1933, appears to have become a true crisis, "... a situation which comes into being as a result of a *special form* of social and individual *reaction to stress*." "Fear ... is replaced by anxiety..." and society rapidly

... becomes more preoccupied with alleviating its state of anxiety than its fear, and practically ceases to do anything about the anger which elicited the fear in the first place. Figuratively speaking, a society in crisis clamours for "cultural bromides" rather than for tools and weapons.¹⁴

The mid-depression mayors were the pharmacists who offered the bromides to the people. Their anodynes were of a special quality: they did not require already traumatized people to attempt untried and risky experiments but rather emphasized the verities, the familiar certainties, usually of an age gone by. They appealed to the powerful and fundamental conservatism bred by economic distress. Of equal importance, they transcended the looming class confrontation of urban Canada that had been exaggerated by unemployment and relief. Many, including the unemployed, were clearly unwilling to take the risk posed by a Socialist-Conventional

politics of confrontation. Others simply found the idea of political confrontation unpalatable as there was little in their experience to prepare them for it. The Charismatic offered an alternative to a split in the urban community, usually by using the device of scape-goating. That is, he tried to turn the entire community against an external enemy - and it could be anything from moral corruption to an international Jewish conspiracy - to exorcise the internal clash.

The successes of the Charismatics, if widespread, were brief. Defective analysis and ineffective organization were important to this transience. But there were other factors. By 1937 a waxing economy and the efforts of senior governments had begun to relieve social distress more effectively. There also occurred at the provincial level the emergence of politicians like Duplessis, Hepburn, Aberhart, and Pattullo, who somewhat replicated the strident city leaders in a more potent jurisdiction. In addition, the mayors lacked the sort of power base to make good on their promises, and success, as Weber argues, is essential for the charismatic. The cities were statutory creatures of the provinces and mendicants to both the provincial and federal governments.¹⁵ As mayors, they shared power with a council that was often antagonistic and full of rivals. And the Charismatic mayors could rarely win the whole of their cities. There were always the stubborn hold-outs of Convention and Socialism awaiting the opportunity to counter-attack.

But in their brief period of success the Charismatics produced a variegated impact on the

substantive political alternatives. In some cases there were long-term effects. In this sense the Charismatics were more than just curiosities. Three outcomes of their activities can in general be postulated: the situation where the Charismatic made little or no difference; the situation where he contributed to a successful Socialist challenge to Convention; and the situation where he contributed to the wreck of ascendant Socialism. The various patterns of interaction and their consequences are best demonstrated by example.

In cities like Ottawa, Socialism did not emerge as a viable political option. More important, from the inception of settlement in 1826 the politics of a city was divided fairly evenly along "national" lines. In "upper town" was the dominant Anglo-Protestant group. It had developed a set of educational, charitable, medical, religious, and ethnic institutions. It had a commercial centre along Sparks Street and a political base in the central and western wards of the city. To the east of the division physically marked by the Rideau Canal were the French and Irish Roman Catholics. They dominated "lower town," and they had a complete set of institutions, including a university, mostly based on the Roman Catholic church. Their commercial focus was on Rideau Street and the Byward Market, and a political base was found in By and Ottawa wards. Other areas of the city tended to mediate the primary division.

In terms of the social morphology the city was segmented, and each social segment had a more or less coherent ideology that was expressed through its institutions.

Each also had a reliable political base since the ward divisions; that is, the political geography, corresponded to the social divisions. But in both sections Conventional factionalism was the dominant mode, since Socialism was weak and, except in rare circumstances, little tolerated, whether in upper town or lower.

The upper town was most of the time dominant in local politics in the nineteenth century, though not completely so. The lower town, especially with an Anglo-Catholic mayor, sometimes had taken charge, and occasionally - once every ten years was the "tradition" - a French-Canadian had been permitted the mayoral honours. But in the first three decades of the twentieth century, except for 1900 and part of 1908 and 1924, there were no French-Canadians as chief magistrates. The 'thirties did not change the pattern. It was shattered not by French-Canadians, who tried, but by an Irish, Roman Catholic druggist, contractor, and movie house operator, P.J. Nolan. He was a man unacceptable to the leadership of either section of the city. Typical of the Charismatic quixotics, he lived in the interstices of his society. He was born in lower town, began his drug store business among the labourers of LeBreton Flats, and by the time he ran for mayor lived at one of the exclusive addresses in upper town, a few doors down from his opponent, the incumbent, Conventional mayor. He returned to lower town only to campaign, to urge that "one of our boys" be mayor, and to hammer his conventional opponents, both upper and lower town, for their nefarious deals with the local traction company and with the supplier of relief fuel. Nolan won the civic elections of 1933 with the votes

from the predominantly French-Canadian, Irish, Roman Catholic and working class wards. The central wards, as usual, held solid for his Anglo-Conventional opponent.

After two years, Nolan was out. Typically, he had failed to "routinize" his electoral success, failing, in particular, to create any successful alliances with the Conventional politicians, of either the upper town or lower town, who, throughout Nolan's tenure, dominated both the Board of Control and City Council. Instead the Conventional groups reconsolidated their hold on the city, a hold that had been somewhat shaken in 1930-31 by a scandal in the Ottawa Housing Commission that had resulted in a large number of political "retirements." Perhaps of equal importance were the relatively good times Ottawa enjoyed in the 'thirties. Levels of unemployment were lower than in any other major city in the country, and the trauma of unemployment and relief was less pronounced. Convention, led by the upper town but with a good deal of lower-town support, put an end to Nolan's regime and placed in office a man who had the longest string of victories of any mayor in the city's history. In this sense, it might be argued that Nolan brought down a more or less permanent reaction on his "boys" from the lower town.

Montreal was also typical of this pattern, but in reverse. There the power of democracy was in the hands of the French-Canadian renter classes, who, along with some other socio-economic minorities, tended to opt persistently for the Charismatic in preference to either French or English convention. That is, Convention in Montreal was actually

in the minority, a perversion, in their minds, of the natural order and one which they repeatedly tried to correct. Occasionally Convention could dish a Charismatic, but only where the French and English versions collaborated and only where they could effect an alliance with someone or something that would deliver part of the working class vote (for example organized labour before the First War; or *un enfant du peuple*, like Houde, in 1928; or the dominant provincial political machine, as in 1932 and 1936). But Convention was never able to crack Montreal's Charismatic tradition on a permanent basis, not even with the massive structural gerrymander at the end of the 'thirties, in which the mayor was made a figurehead, and the council was composed of representatives, one-third elected by all voters, one-third elected by the property-owners alone, and one-third nominated by institutions, like the Board of Trade and the universities.

The second type of pattern found in depression politics, best represented by Regina, is Socialism ascendant. Winnipeg represents a somewhat less successful variant. In Regina in the 'twenties and 'thirties the left was a lively presence, especially in the working-class east end, and had generated some fairly large popular votes, especially in the early 'thirties. But it had little concrete success because the "at large" system militated against the numerically smaller Socialist constituency. The Socialist threat nonetheless precipitated a Conventional, non-partisan organization, which emerged in 1932 as the Civic Government Association. As usual, it charged the left with introducing parties

into civic politics. The left was cynical. One of its candidates "...classified the members as bond-dealers and rent-collectors...."¹⁶ Another termed the CGA a "pup" from the Board of Trade.¹⁷ The CGA was quite successful at the outset, with its numerically larger constituency in the central and western parts of the city favoured by the "at large" system. It was unable, however, to control or challenge a number of active ratepayers' organizations that ran a successful campaign, despite the vigorous opposition of the Board of Trade, to change the political geography from an "at large" system to a ward system. As well, the CGA did not run its slate with a mayoral ticket-leader until 1934. In that year, however, the CGA's candidate was decapitated by Cornelius Rink, a Charismatic. This set-back, coupled with the change to the ward system for the 1936 elections, seemed to demoralize the CGA, and the left, capitalizing on its strength in the east end wards and the upset of Convention by Rink, swept into power. It became the dominant political force in the city for a generation.

Winnipeg represented a less successful variant of Regina for the Socialist elements. The city was sharply segmented along both socio-cultural and socio-economic lines with the wealthy WASP community entrenched in the south end of the city and the working-class "foreigners" in the north. Between them lay heterogenous zone that included most of the institutional, commercial, and wholesaling activities of the city. This social segmentation was reinforced by the political geography of the city: three large, multi-member wards corresponded almost exactly

with the three social areas. The political geography was in turn reinforced by the political and other institutions that had become embedded in the north and south ends, especially in the years following the 1919 General Strike. One might say that the north and south ends of the city fought over the warm body in the middle for control of the local government. Generally the south won, but an important, perhaps central, element in its victories, apart from its non-partisan organizations, was a mayoral ticket-leader of eminence or one who had the common touch, like the mayor for the first half of the depression, Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Webb. Webb was a hotel manager whose personal depression devils were the Wheat Board and the Americans. Webb's successor at the head of Coventional forces was a paragon of orthodoxy but one who lacked the common touch, Alderman J.R. McKerchar. Even Webb felt he was "not the man for Winnipeg at this time."¹⁸ And McKerchar was no match for the socialist ticket-leader, John Queen, who had been a prominent figure in Winnipeg labour from 1919, and in 1935 was a member of the provincial legislature. Queen won, along with a left council. Convention, by not harnessing itself to a strong candidate or associating itself with a Charismatic one, opened the door to the Socialist hordes. In Winnipeg, the absence of a Charismatic in 1935 created change, and though the Socialists never became the commanding force in Winnipeg that they were in Regina, they did establish themselves as an alternative capable of taking power. Convention could never rest easy.

The third general variation on the municipal scene in the

depression was Socialism denied, and it was here that the Charismatic was most effective. Vancouver is perhaps the best example of all the elements working together. There a segmented city existed that was much like Winnipeg, with the Socialists strong in the east end, and Convention in the west. But unlike Winnipeg, the division was largely socio-economic, the city being largely homogeneous in a cultural sense. As for leadership, it tended to be a struggle in the 'twenties and the first half of the 'thirties between Convention and the Charismatic, L.D. Taylor. Taylor drew much of his support from the working-class east end and a more heterogenous zone in the centre of the city. In effect, he denied the left a ticket-leader. Gerry McGeer, himself a Charismatic, destroyed Taylor in the 1934 elections in what seems to have been a depression reaction, McGeer winning every poll in the city, east end and west. But McGeer, a strident independent with a marked antipathy for "socialistic doctrines," tended to polarize the city, and in his two years as mayor the left made marked gains at the aldermanic level in the east end wards. The solution to the Socialist threat was simple and the reverse of electoral change in Regina. McGeer, apparently through his former connections with the provincial government, changed the political geography from a ward to an "at large" system, hand-picked his successor, and then helped organize, in 1937, the Non-Partisan Association which was composed mainly of provincial Liberals and Conservatives. In their first election the NPA - with their majority constituency in the city taken as a whole - crushed the Socialists. The left has been a relatively insignificant force at

the local level since. Edmonton and Toronto were also good examples of the Vancouver phenomenon; that is, one in which a Charismatic denies or strips away potential left leadership and provides an opening for organized Convention to gain or regain control permanently.

Though the quixotic Charismatics in perspective appear as foolish and as ineffective as Cervantes' knight, they were in a number of instances important elements in change. They were not of themselves revolutionary, but by sometimes unwittingly moving the political dynamic into new courses for a period, they opened the possibility of more substantial change. It seems reasonable to argue that the "routinization" of Charisma was not the more normal process of change, at least in the "sandbox politics" of the city, but rather the impact that Charisma had on routine. Change, then, occurred in these circumstances, when political bodies were sufficiently organized to exploit the opportunities created by Charismatic crisis leadership.

* * *

NOTES

1. In Ottawa, for example, the maximum tenure ever, until 1935, was four years, and that only twice.
2. For example, W.H. Malkin, in Vancouver in 1928, who had no political experience at all; J.H. Ashdown, in Winnipeg, in 1907, an alderman 30 years previous; or Fernand Rinfret, in Montreal, in 1932, a federal minister with no municipal experience.
3. Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, selected papers, edited and with an

- introduction by S.N. Eisenstadt, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 46.
4. The Edmonton *Bulletin*, 13 November 1934.
 5. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
 6. G.G. McGeer, *The Conquest of Poverty*, (Gardenvale, Quebec: The Garden City Press, 1935).
 7. The Edmonton *Bulletin*, 5 December 1925, ad.
 8. Done essentially by taking the votes by ward (or where available by poll) and comparing them with the rather broad social data available in Canada, *Census*, 1941, Population Bulletins A-15 and A-16, which were broken down by ward and in the case of Winnipeg and Vancouver by social area, and the Housing Atlases developed for the major cities in the same census. The atlases were most useful in terms of their mapping of various income levels of wage-earner households and levels of housing and conveniences in the various cities. Comprehensive tracting was not done in Canada until 1951.
 9. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
 11. Camillien Houde, "A Call to the Youth of Canada," printed text of an address over the national network of the Canadian Radio Commission, 7 October 1934, in L'Archives du Québec, Raynault Papers, Photos Personnelles et Brochures Diverses, unpaginated.
 12. *Ibid.*
 13. George Devereaux, "Charismatic Leadership and Crisis," *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, Vol. 4, (New York: International University Press, 1955), pp. 145-57.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
 15. Generally a one-third split among the three levels of government.
 16. The Regina *Leader-Post*, 16 November 1932.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. Ralph Webb to R.B. Bennett, Winnipeg, 14 November 1934, Public Archives of Canada, R.B. Bennett papers, Mfm. M-1104, pp. 286123-4.